ensightful

Revolutionizing Project Management in Research Projects

Case Study | Conestoga College

Key Benefits

→ **Improved Formative Feedback:** The seamless sharing of working documents between students and faculty advisors made it easy for to provide formative feedback during the project.

→ **Real-Time Progress Visualization:** Ensightful provided visual progress reports; helping students and faculty advisors understand their project status and pending tasks.

→ **Introduction of Project Management Skills:** Introducing Ensightful developed project management skills in students, making them more adept at handling complex projects in the future.

→ **Enhanced Student Engagement:** The platform increases student engagement and commitment to the project, as observed by students' realization of the platform's value over the course of the semester.

Introduction

Conestoga is one of Canada's top research colleges located in Ontario with more than 30,000 students.

The academic landscape is in constant flux, with it becoming increasingly challenging for students to handle complex, comprehensive projects that are integral to their education.

Ken Diplock, an experienced faculty member at Conestoga College's School of Health & Life Sciences, observed this predicament firsthand.

His students, grappling with daunting research projects, commonly slipped into the pitfall of procrastination, significantly underestimating the workload required to reach their end goals. Ken was aware of this hurdle and realized the necessity of a tool that could streamline project management for his students and support faculty advisors – Ensightful.

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The Challenge for Students

The challenge lay in the enormity of the research projects assigned at the semester's onset. Students, often overwhelmed by the project's scope, tended to postpone their work until the term's end, leading to a bottleneck of tasks.

Ken poignantly illustrated this issue, *"The students suffer from the condition that the research project is not due until the end of the semester, so they procrastinate."*

This procrastination left students underprepared and overwhelmed as the deadlines approached, emphasizing the need for a method to dissect these daunting projects into smaller, more manageable tasks. Even then, students need help in tracking these smaller tasks and ensuring that they are completed on time or they risk delaying the entire project.

KEN DIPLOCK an Instructor at Conestoga College's *School of Health and Life Sciences*

Why Ensightful?

The answer to this significant student challenge emerged in the form of Ensightful, a project management platform designed specifically for student projects in universities and colleges. Ken was drawn to Ensightful's potential to guide students in developing SMART (Specific, Measurable, Assignable, Realistic, Time-related) tasks. There was also the ability for faculty members to populate sample tasks ahead of time as a guide to all students.

> "We can put in steps to get the students to break things down and help them recognize that they are completing things week over week.

The platform also served as a reminder for students about what needed to be done to complete each major milestone every time they checked on their project. This gave them an opportunity to regroup and refocus throughout the term.

Addressing Faculty Pain Points

Faculty members at Conestoga College, along with Ken Diplock, encountered their share of challenges prior to the adoption of Ensightful. These difficulties ranged from administrative and logistical problems to issues directly impacting the formative feedback process.

One of the most significant pain points was the absence of an efficient method to monitor and guide students in real-time. Without a comprehensive platform, faculty struggled to gain insights into students' work. As Ken recounted, *"This is where we find Ensightful very helpful because we have a hybrid model, and students can't just drop by the faculty's office."*

> "Ensightful worked really well as a way to organize material. This allows the faculty to see what the student is working on at any time and review their work and prepare for their advisory meeting.

This disconnect was particularly challenging as each advisor was responsible for overseeing multiple projects, thus necessitating a means for efficient communication and student tracking.

The platform allowed instructors to view student work in real-time, enabling them to identify areas of improvement promptly and *"provide guidance at crucial moments during the project development rather than waiting for completed work."* This perspective allowed instructors to understand better where students might struggle, thus facilitating more targeted, personalized feedback.

Secondly, the faculty advisors faced logistical challenges associated with document management. Before Ensightful, advisors and students used OneDrive for document storage and sharing.

This approach resulted in a "hodgepodge of solutions," as Ken described it, requiring them to manually assign access to different files. This system was not only inefficient but also led to confusion regarding document versions which detracted from the learning experience. Lastly, the reliance on emails for feedback and file sharing presented problems, including lost files or emails and overcrowded inboxes.

This caused confusion among faculty and students, with a common issue being uncertainty about what document or version they were supposed to be examining.

Faculty members found enormous value in features like the Files page, which enabled seamless document storage and sharing. "We no longer have to worry about having 2 copies of the same document."

The platform's ability to streamline document management, improve real-time monitoring, and enhance communication significantly alleviated the faculty's pain points, making it a vital tool for the research project.

> "Ensightful helps us avoid the issue of losing files or emails because it is easy to clog up your email inbox. Ensightful makes it clear what the advisors are looking at.

Focusing on *Process* instead of *Product*

Although initially perceived as an extra task, Ensightful's utility became apparent as the semester progressed.

Ken reminisced, *"At first, the students felt it was something extra that they had to do. As they go through the platform, they realize the value, and at the end, they realize the value of a project management tool."* This evolving perspective was a testament to Ensightful's practicality and effectiveness.

Ensightful was not limited to a project management tool for students; it was incorporated into the academic assessment process. As Ken elucidated, *"We also added Ensightful as a part of the evaluation via the 'activity online,' which basically entailed their usage of Ensightful. Did the students update their tasks and complete them on time?"*

This approach encouraged students to actively use the platform and provided faculty with a tangible measure of students' time management skills and project management skills – tying academic performance with practical tool utilization.

Semester at a Glance

693

TASKS CREATED

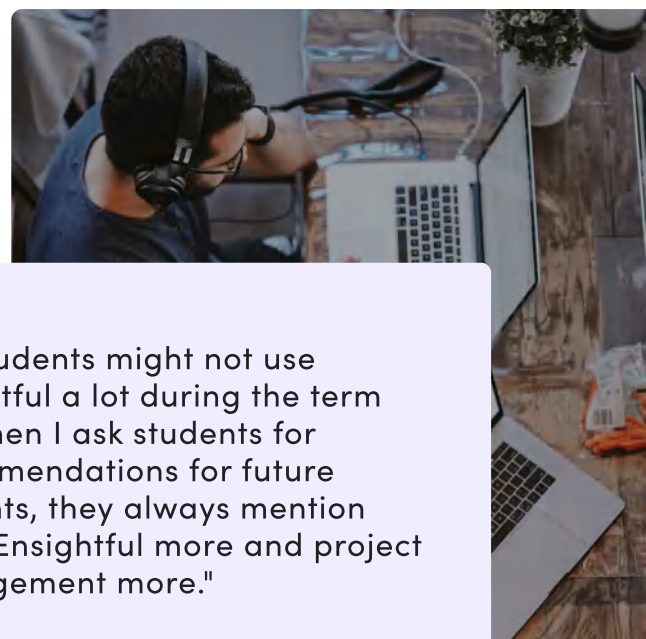**2487**

TASK UPDATES

240

FILES UPLOADED

210

LINKS UPLOADED

Student Feedback and Outcomes

One crucial aspect of the implementation of Ensightful was the positive student feedback regarding the usage of a project management tool. Ken's students acknowledged the tool's usefulness, especially in breaking down their tasks and aiding in meeting their project goals. The students found the visual representation of their progress particularly helpful in understanding how much they had achieved and what tasks were pending. The frequent advice to future students was to use Ensightful more and fully leverage its project management capabilities.

"The students might not use Ensightful a lot during the term but when I ask students for recommendations for future students, they always mention using Ensightful more and project management more."

KEN DIPLOCK
Conestoga Instructor

The Future of Ensightful at Conestoga College

Recognizing the potential of early student exposure to project management skills, Ken plans to introduce Ensightful earlier in the program curriculum. He plans to expand Ensightful's usage into several other courses, such as lower-level courses '*Intro to Environmental Health*' and '*Food Science and Technology*'.

His future vision also includes integrating Ensightful activity as student tasks in D2L, the college's learning management system, to boost its weekly usage.

"Going forward, I would like to put Ensightful as a task on D2L each week, which might enhance the weekly use of Ensightful. I would also like to utilize milestones in the future.

KEN DIPLOCK
Conestoga Instructor

Conclusion

The integration of Ensightful at Conestoga College marked a significant shift in the perception of project management in higher education. The platform's intuitive design helped students navigate their projects while enhancing faculty-student collaboration. Additionally, it led to improved project outcomes, thereby validating its inclusion. Ken's experience provides a compelling case study for Ensightful's potential to transform project management within academic settings and is a testament to the value of harnessing technology to advance education.